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Language Choice of Urban Sino-Indians in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

SUMMARY

Language choice in mixed marriages plays a crucial role in language maintenance. It helps in maintaining at least one or two languages from generation to generation. In this study an examination on the language choice of some Sino-Indian Malaysians in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, is explored to find out the language choice in a range of domains and with different speech partners. Sino-Indians are the offspring of marriages between Indians and Chinese. There were 30 participants consisting of 14 males and 16 females who took part in the study. A questionnaire consisting of 89 items was administered to the participants who were working or studying in Kuala Lumpur at that time. The findings reveal that language choice in some Sino-Indian families is influenced by factors such as age, domains of communication, attitudes towards the language, and identity. Age plays an important role in language choice, particularly in the home domain. Some older Sino-Indian speakers are bilingual in English and Malay, the middle-aged speakers are trilingual and speak more in English and some Tamil and Chinese, and the younger speakers are multilingual but favour the use of English. This study has also examined how the Sino-Indian respondents viewed their dual heritage.

KEY WORDS: language choice, mixed marriages, Sino-Indians, identity, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Raiz Hassan said that “in most ethnically heterogeneous societies, interethnic unions constitute only a very small proportion of total marriages. The large majority of people in almost all societies are predominantly endogamous...[exogamous] therefore, it represents a deviation from a commonplace universal norm of marriage” (1974: 1). However, in today’s contemporary world, where pop-culture is boosted by technology and the mass media (as well as education), exogamous marriages are gaining momentum. Pop-culture has enabled mass media audiences to perceive members of other races or cultures as being more desirable and appealing.

The continuous increase of mixed marriages worldwide reveals that many people look at mixed marriages positively. However, the acceptance of mixed marriages in many countries has also brought negative effects on a community’s language and culture. Holmes (2008) argues that such marriages accelerate language shift and results in displacement of the mother tongue of either the husband or the wife. In many instances,

one of the two languages is usually abandoned by younger members of the family. The impact of mixed marriages on language shift is crucial because language shift starts at home.

Since offspring of mixed marriages have parents with different sets of cultural values and languages, such children are interesting subjects for research. Mixed marriages have influenced language choice and to some extent, propagated shift. For instance, some of the Malayalee Catholics in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, who had contracted mixed marriages shifted to English (David and Nambiar, 2002) while the offspring of Pakistani men and their Kelantanese wives in Machang, Kelantan, Malaysia shifted to Kelantanese Malay (David, 2003).

2. Objective

This research analyzes the language choice of some Sino-Indian Malaysians living in the city of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The Sino-Indian participants in the study are those whose parents are Indians and Chinese and are locally known as Chindians. They will, however, be referred to as Sino-Indians in this paper. The analysis focuses on their language choice in a range of domains and with different speech partners.

3. Literature review

3.1. Mixed marriages

Maretzki (1977) defines mixed marriages as marriages between spouses of different cultural backgrounds and languages who may have different values, beliefs, customs, traditions or lifestyles. Such differences may be advantageous or disadvantageous to their offspring. If the parents or their children use both languages and cultures this will enrich them but on the other hand, if one language or culture is abandoned, this can be disempowering and is a form of negative bilingualism.

3.1.2. Problems faced in mixed marriages

In any intercultural marriage, problems arise when two people of different cultural backgrounds become aware of the differences between their ways of life. Tseng (1977: 94) says that when couples are in the process of courtship, they may not realise how the differences could affect their lives until they begin living together. He explains that this is because sociocultural values and ideologies come into play in mixed marriages. But how do members of mixed marriages deal with the problems they face? In his study of mixed marriages in neighbouring Singapore, Hassan (1974: 57) created a framework to explain how values are modified in interethnic marriages (see Table 1).

It is evident that accommodation in the family occurs when a spouse is a nominal member and the other spouse is also a nominal member; or when a spouse is a peripheral member while the other is also a peripheral member; or when a spouse is a peripheral member and the other a nominal member. However, if one spouse is a full member, the other spouse would most likely be assimilated into the dominant spouse's culture. If both spouses are full members, cultural and value conflicts are bound to occur.

Table 1: Spouses' ethnic rootedness

		Husband's ethnic rootedness		
		N.M.	P.M.	F.M.
Wife's ethnic rootedness	N.M.*	accommodation	accommodation	assimilation
	P.M.**	accommodation	accommodation	assimilation
	F.M.***	assimilation	assimilation	conflict

Adopted from Hassan (1974: 57)

* NM – a Nominal Member is a passive partner who does not hold his/her cultural values strongly.

** PM – a Peripheral Member is a member who practices more flexibility than a fully involved person more rooted in his or her culture.

*** FM – a Full Member is a member who asserts dominance of his/her own culture.

However, Hassan's framework does not always apply in the Malaysian setting when a mixed marriage takes place between a Malay spouse and a non-Malay spouse. Generally, Malaysians view a Malay as one who is a Muslim, speaks Malay and lives a Malay way of life. In other words, it is important that the non-Malay spouse will have to become a Malay by shedding his/her cultural values and assimilate to cultural values of the Malay culture.

This research, however, does not focus on mixed marriages with the Malay community (see David, 2003) but between Chinese and Indian. It will be interesting to see if a similar pattern of assimilation to the language and cultural values of one partner in the marriage applies.

Cultural values in mixed marriages are put to the test when children are born into such families. Dugan (1988) wrote that when children are born in intercultural families, problems arise. One of these problems is "What language should be taught?" (Dugan, 1988: 84).

3.2. Language choice

Language choice is driven by many factors, such as a speaker's first language, community language, age, education, role-relationships, ethnicity, dominant language, social status, economic and political position of the linguistic group and the neutrality of language (Dumanig, 2007).

The choice of the first language (L1) as a medium of communication among bilingual and multilingual speakers seems to be common in many multilingual societies. Fasold (1990) believes that the preference of the first language occurs when speakers are confused which language must be used in certain situations. Consequently, speakers tend to prefer their L1 because of their familiarity and fluency in that language. The more familiar and fluent the speakers are in their language, the more convenience and ease they experience as they communicate as there is no extra effort needed in order to speak the language.

Choosing the first language is not only influenced by its convenience and comfort but is also a form of showing one's identity. Spolsky (2004) explains that one's language displays one's ethnic identity and language loyalty.

On the other hand, some bilingual and multilingual speakers sometimes prefer using a community language rather than the first language due to practical, political and economic reasons. It is sometimes practical to use the community language because it is widely understood by the entire community and it is easier to communicate with others and to transact business because of language familiarity. Community language is preferred by most bilingual and multilingual speakers as their base language for it provides them more chances of economic benefits (Bradley and Bradley, 2002; Degefa, 2004; Johansson, 1991; Yau, 1997).

In some cases, bilingual or multilingual speakers will prefer the dominant language instead of using the community language because of its predominance and prestige in the community (Ferrer and Sankoff, 2004). The use of a more prestigious or dominant language will help speakers to accelerate their status in society.

Age is also an influential factor in language choice because people of different ages vary in their language preferences. The older members of a community may prefer a different language compared to the younger due to differences in language exposure and orientation. In a study conducted on language choice of the Hungarian community in Obertwart, Austria, it was found that young people prefer German when talking with their peers but use Hungarian when talking with older members of the community (Gal, 1979).

It is clear then that many factors determine language choice. Before analysing the language choice of a small number of Sino-Indians in Kuala Lumpur, earlier studies of Sino-Indians in other parts of Malaysia i.e. the Northern area of Peninsular Malaysia, Penang and Kedah and their preferred language will be discussed.

3.3. Cultural patterns in Malaysian Sino-Indian mixed marriages

Nadarajan's (1994) study of five Sino-Indian families (four Indian husbands with Chinese wives and one Chinese husband with an Indian wife) in Georgetown, Penang, reveals that cultural markers (such as language) are determined by the spouses' ethnic rootedness. Her subjects were Buddhists (if Chinese) and Hindus (if Indian).

Nadarajan, quoting Sanusi Osman (1981), says families that fall into the "accommodation" category (see Raiz Hassan's patterns of miscegenation in 3.1.2) are families that "have a culture that mirrors an intermixture of two cultures in their way of life" (1994: 9). Such accommodation is clear in the case of Sino-Indian participants. The choice of either Tamil or Cantonese or Hokkien (both are Chinese dialects) or both were dependent on the following factors:

- exposure to "intensive interactions" with maternal grandmothers and cousins
- practise of cultural accommodation (e.g. having two different altars, celebrating both Indian and Chinese festivals and eating food of Indian and Chinese origin)
- being spoken to by the parents in the vernacular languages be they Tamil, Cantonese or Hokkien
- consistent and ongoing interactions with friends of different language background (such intensive interactions are intensive and determine the dominant language)

used and one Sino-Indian family revealed that the sibling of one child who mixed with Indian friends naturally used Tamil, while the other child used Chinese because of her Chinese friends).

It is clear therefore that social networks influence language choice (see David, 2005). Ultimately, according to Nadarajan: “The process of absorption of learning of cultural traits is likely to occur when there is an intense interaction with the individual or group or when there is a strong desire to acquire those particular traits. This is seen in this context of the members of the Sino-Indian families whereby they learn and absorb to a certain extent the characteristics of their friends’ cultural traits” (1994: 31).

Rejection from one’s ethnic community due to mixed marriages may result in assimilation towards the other community. Assimilation takes place if a parent is a nominal or peripheral member and his/her spouse is a full member of his/her culture. In such situations, the full member will assert his/her dominance and the family’s children will practise the full member parent’s culture. In one family, Nadarajan reports that one of the participants, a Chinese lady, took up Indian culture as she was a nominal member of her own culture, while her husband, a full member, asserted his “rootedness” at home. In addition, the family’s children did not have any communication channel with their Chinese mother’s kin because the latter had severed ties after finding out that she married a non-Chinese. This rejection acted as a catalyst for both the Chinese woman and her children to gravitate towards her husband’s culture. Hence, the Chinese woman wore the sari, put the *putuu* (a symbolic dot put on the forehead to represent marital status) and spoke only in English or Tamil to her children. Because she used her mother tongue, Cantonese only at the market place, her children did not learn their mother’s Chinese dialect.

Another researcher, Arumugam (1990) describes the lives of nine Sino-Indian families in a small town in the Northern Peninsular Malaya called Sungai Patani, which is in the state of Kedah. In her study, there were four fathers who were Chinese while the other five were Indians. The study revealed that these families and their offspring in ethnic and race-conscious Malaysia found ways to cope with cultural problems such as the categorisation of offspring’ ethnicity and religion in official documents (e.g. birth certificates, legal documents, etc.). She reports that the official race of Sino-Indians which was documented on official forms depended on their father’s race. This is reflected in four families (father = Chinese and mother = Indian) where the official race of the children was Chinese. However, in the other five families where the fathers were Indians, the official race of the children as documented on forms was Indian. In Sungai Petani, although Sino-Indian children had been exposed to their mother’s side, Arumugam discloses that they followed their father’s ethnicity and religion. This is also because the patriarchal system is still dominant in Malaysia.

Both Nadarajan’s and Arumugam’s studies reveal that there is a tendency for children of Sino-Indians to be multilingual and acquire and speak more than two languages, namely Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil. Arumugam reported that children obtained their exposure from their family network, i.e. parents, cousins, grandparents and friends. In addition, children acquired the ability to read, write and speak Malay and English at

school. In short, Sino-Indian children have the vantage when it comes to languages as they in most cases have the languages of one or both their parents and in all cases use both the national and international languages.

Discussing identity, Arumugam (1990: 35) argues that Sino-Indians have the opportunity to swap identities anytime depending on the situations they encounter as their physical features resemble that of the dominant group in the country, i.e. the Malays. In addition, the fact that they are able to speak three or more languages helps the Sino-Indians to blend in with the larger community in multiracial Malaysia. She cites a case where a respondent told her that he was able to evade [sic] a Malay police officer because of his looks and his command of the Malay language (Arumugam, 1990: 35).

Adapting Fishman's concept of nationalism and nationism (1968, in Omar, 1992: 66), the language choices that exist in the homes of Sino-Indians can be explained. Fishman defines nationalism as "the process of transformation from fragmentary and tradition-bound ethnicity to unifying and ideologized nationality" and when it is related to language, nationalism represents "a more ideologized historical interaction (in terms of mass ideology) since nationalism so commonly elaborates upon language as one of its markers of symbolic unity and identity" (1968, in Omar, 1992: 66). As Sino-Indian children are exposed to different worlds, they are able to pick up Chinese and Indian dialects, provided their parents use their respective mother tongues when talking to their children and their parents practice "accommodation" at home. In other words, English, Tamil and a Chinese dialect becomes "nationalism" codes that define the children's identities.

Because of "nationalism" and "nationism", Gupta (1997) explains that minority groups in Malaysia have undergone some language shift towards both (Standard) Malay and English (for further information on the education system see David and Govindasamy, 2005). Omar (1992: 66) argues that English is essential to Malaysia's aspiration to become a developed and industrial nation. However, for Sino-Indians, it appears that both English AND Malay have become the "nationism" codes because these codes are used for professional purposes (e.g. at the workplace, at government settings and trade).

4. Methodology

A questionnaire consisting of 89 questions was administered to 30 respondents (16 females and 14 males) in Kuala Lumpur. Each of the three respondents was from different parts of Malaysia like Perak, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan; two were from Johor and another two from Melaka, four were from Penang, and thirteen from Kuala Lumpur. All 30 respondents are working or studying and/or have retired in Kuala Lumpur at that time.

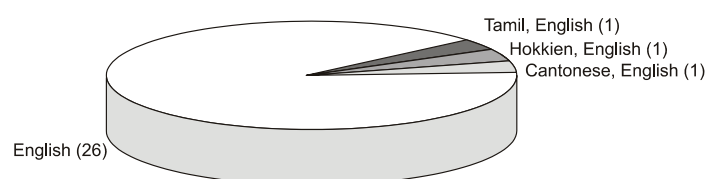
The questionnaire used in this study was piloted to ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument. Reliability is a central concept in measurement and it basically refers to consistency, internal consistency and consistency over time (Punch, 1998). Validity helps to determine the appropriateness of the instrument. It is concerned with the extent to which the instrument measures what it was designed to measure (Wiersma, 1991).

Five (5) Sino-Indians from different age groups were involved in the pilot test. All the statements in the questionnaire were checked to ensure each statement in the questionnaire was understood. Following the comments from the respondents, some of the words used in the instructions as well as sentences were improved. This was to ensure greater clarity and specificity and to help the respondents understand and interpret the statements accurately.

5. Demographic profile of respondents

The respondents came from a wide range of religious affiliations. Twenty of the respondents are Christians (Catholics – 11; Protestants – 9), seven Hindus, two Buddhist and one Atheist. Twenty two respondents were working (the other eight were still in schooling) and earning more than RM1000 a month.

Chart 1: Respondents' mother tongue



It is clear then that English is the dominant language of the large majority of the respondents. It also reveals that the large majority of the respondents (26) used English as their first language, while one respondent's first languages were both Tamil and English, one Malay and English, one Hokkien and English and one were Cantonese and English.

Table 2: Respondents' age

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
12–19	2	3
20–29	4	6
30–39	5	4
40–59	3	3
Total (n)	14	16
Total (%)	46.6	53.3

Table 2 shows the respondents' age groups and gender. There are five participants in the 12–19 age group, ten in 20–29 age group, nine in 30–39 age group, and six in 40–59 age group.

6. Language choices

6.1. Language with family and friends

English has taken precedence in the participants' lives regardless of their age groups. Three respondents whose age group ranges from 12–19 years speak English with their maternal and paternal grandparents. Two others speak English with their maternal grandparents, father (F), and siblings. One respondent speaks English with his paternal grandfather (PGF) and mother (M) but the other uses some Chinese when speaking to his paternal grandfather and mother respectively.

Those in the 20–29 age group also speak English with everyone; however, they are also able to use English and Tamil with their siblings, and Sino-Indian friends and relatives.

Among those respondents whose age group ranges from 30–39 years, all of them speak English with their fathers, mothers, siblings, Sino-Indian and non Sino-Indian friends. A few of them speak more English and less Tamil with their fathers, mothers and siblings. Some use more of English and less pidgin Malay when speaking to paternal grandfathers, mothers and non Sino-Indian friends. Some use more English and less Chinese with mother and Sino-Indian friends. As for Malay, the national language of Malaysia, only 4 respondents speak a variety of Malay i.e. pidgin Malay, only with their maternal and paternal grandparents. Another 4 speak only Chinese with their maternal grandparents, mothers and siblings.

In the 40–59 age group, 22 respondents use English with their parents, siblings, Sino-Indian and non-Sino-Indian friends and 7 use English and Chinese when communicating with the maternal grandmother and mothers, and 7 use Tamil with their paternal grandparents and fathers. Seven (7) respondents in this age group report they use the same amount of English and Tamil with their fathers and 7 use a mix of English, Chinese and Tamil with their siblings.

Half of the respondents in the 40–59 age group used English when talking to their maternal grandparents, paternal grandfathers, fathers, mother, siblings, Sino-Indian and non-Sino-Indian friends while the other half used more English and less Malay with their maternal grandparents, paternal grandparents, fathers, mothers, siblings, Sino-Indian and non-Sino-Indian friends.

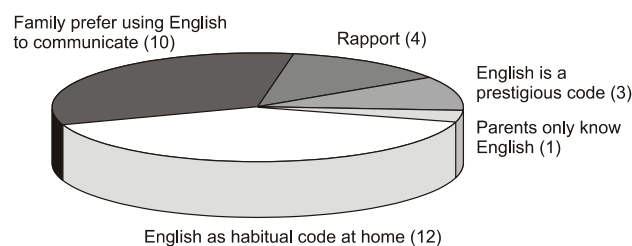
It is therefore obvious that across the Sino-Indian age groups, English has become dominant in close social networks. However, due to multilingualism, a mixed language of dominant English or some Chinese or Tamil and even Malay has emerged in talk with grandparents and even to some siblings. Such use of a mix of more than one language in the discourse is fairly common in Malaysia (see David and Kaur, 2004; Jariah, 2004; Kow, 2003). The study went on to determine the reasons for this dominant use of English.

6.2. Reasons for using English

There are many reasons to explain why English is spoken at home. Generally, the respondents see English as a pragmatic code. 39.6% of the respondents state that they use English at home because it is habitual, 33.3% use English because their family pre-

fer using English to communicate, 13.2% state they use English because it helps them (see chart 2) to feel close to each other.

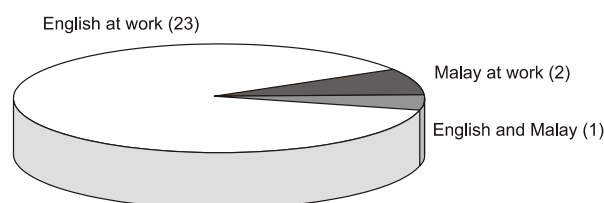
Chart 2: Reasons for using English at home



6.3. Language at work

In the work domain English is the dominant language. At work, 23 respondents said that they primarily use English, while 2 use Malay and 1 uses a combination of English and Malay. Among many of the respondents, English is considered an important language at work (see Chart 3) as English is widely spoken in their respective workplaces.

Chart 3: Language used at work



6.4. Language used in the religious domain

English is also prominent in the religious domain. When praying in a place of worship, 25 use English, 3 use English and Tamil. English has become a common language among Sino-Indians in their religious ceremonies and other religious practices. The fact that a large number of the respondents were Christians and the fact that English is used in many Christian churches in Kuala Lumpur and neighbouring Petaling Jaya explains the use of English in the religious domain.

6.5. Language choice and the media

6.5.1. Television

Language choice in the entertainment domain appears to be varied. The majority of the respondents (9) watch only English programmes followed by a combination of English, Malay and Indian programmes (8). It shows that 4 respondents watch English,

Malay and Chinese programmes, and another 4 watch English, Malay, Indian and Chinese programmes.

6.5.2. Newspapers

As far as the written media is concerned, there is an obvious preference for English. Twenty-six (26) respondents read only English newspapers, the rest read a combination of Malay and English newspapers. It is also clear that, although there are respondents who are able to converse in Tamil, Cantonese, Mandarin and Hokkien, none are able to read these vernacular languages.

6.6. Attitudes and ethnicity

When asked what they thought about their diversity, 29 respondents said that they are proud of having a dual heritage while 1 was ambivalent. However, when asked about how they felt when outsiders wanted to know which ethnic group they belonged to (a common question in race-conscious Malaysia), there were mixed responses (see Table 3). Twenty-nine (29) of the respondents who answered this item in the questionnaire said that they had encountered such enquiries. The responses appears to be mixed with seven respondents giving positive responses to enquiries regarding their ethnicity, six being neutral and another six indicating negative annoyance.

Table 3: Reaction of respondents to questions on ethnicity

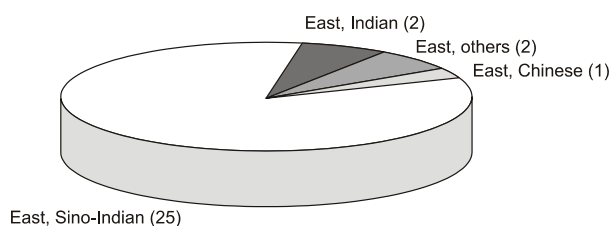
<i>Positive Responses</i>	<i>Neutral Responses</i>	<i>Negative Responses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Happy to explain to them I am mixed. – Honoured, happy to be of mixed parentage. – Proud. – Proud, unique and different. – I feel comfortable. – I enjoy explaining to them my origins. Not offended. Proud to be mixed. – Happy to explain my origins to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not happy. Not sad. I just answer them. – Don't feel anything. I explain as briefly as I can – Neutral – I am used to it, but most people assume I'm a Malay these days after seeing my wife. – Nothing as it is expected. – Indifferent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Embarrassed – Shy sometimes. – Irritated when they don't believe I'm Sino-Indian. – Tired of explaining. I feel like I am repeating myself over and over again. – Annoyed that I have to keep explaining I am mixed. – I don't mind them asking but I get annoyed and angry when they just go on being presumptuous and I am a Malay.
N = 7	N = 6	N = 6

* The total does not equal to 30 as some respondents did not respond to this item.

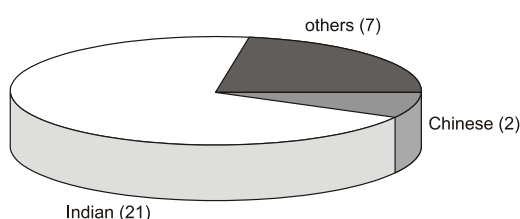
In response to such enquiries, 25 respondents identify themselves as Sino-Indian, while 2 as Malaysian Indians, 2 as others and 1 as Malaysian Chinese. However, when filling up the race column in official forms, 21 fill Indian, 7 fill “others” and 2 filled the Chinese column (see Chart 4).

Chart 4: Identity

Perception of self



Identity in official documents



Eighteen (18) respondents identify more with the Indian community, 6 with the Chinese community, 10% with both the Indian and Chinese community and 10% identify with none. When asked for reasons for gravitation towards either the Chinese or Indian communities, they provided the following reasons (see Table 4).

Table 4: Inclination towards ethnic sociocultural practices

<i>Chinese community</i>	<i>Indian community</i>	<i>Chinese and Indian communities</i>	<i>Neutrality</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I follow my father since he is the head of the family – Closer to dad's side than mum's side. – We spend more time at mum's parents place and we used to live with them. – More influence from mum. – More Chinese influence. – Brought up in a Chinese community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – My father has a stronger influence in our lives. – Father's influence and had more contact with Indian side of the family. – Been growing up in the Indian community. – Most friends in school were Indians. – Because I speak the language I feel like I am part of the community. – Somehow I communicate better and have similar characteristics. – Parents are more Indian in terms of culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Because I am told that I am both – Because I have friends who are both Chinese and Indians. – I have equal amounts of Chinese friends and relatives as I do with Indian ones. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Both have cultural aspects I don't agree with.

When asked what they felt about the Tamil language, 23 respondents said that they are proud of their father's language. The following are the reasons provided by those who said that they were proud of their father's language:

- Tamil is a beautiful language and easy to speak.
- Tradition.
- Good to know your roots and knowing another language is advantageous.
- It's my father's mother tongue and his culture.
- That's the language he spoke to me.
- It's a beautiful language.
- My father is proud of his language and culture and I am proud of it too.
- It's always good to know another language and Tamil (which I understand a few words and sentences) makes it worth while when I communicate with my dad and friends.
- Because English is not the only language in the world.

Similar reasons were provided by the 24 who were proud of their mother's language. The reasons for this pride are listed below:

- English is not the only language in the world.
- It's my mum's mother tongue and her culture.
- Part of my heritage.
- Chinese dialects are useful in the business world and sound nice.
- Beautiful language.
- I have been exposed to it since young and find it easy to communicate with friends and neighbours.

Although sentimental reasons are given for Tamil and Chinese, when asked what they thought of English, they agreed unanimously that English is a language that is important to learn. Twenty (20) respondents said that English is important as it is an international language and used for wider communication (7), language of business (2) and a prestigious language (1).

Similarly, when asked what they thought of Malay, they all unanimously agreed that Malay is also an important language to know because it is the official and national language of Malaysia (17), it is important to communicate in Malaysia (11) and it is the language of instruction in schools (2).

The importance of both languages has probably been influenced by the fact that in the "real world" of multilingual Malaysia, when talking about business or school, 69.3% of the respondents use English and 9.9% use a combination of English and Malay (see David, 2003, on frequency of code-switching in the country).

6.7. Language to be used with their children

When asked: "What language would you use with your children if you get married?" 9 said they will only use English with their children when they get married, 6 will

use English, Malay, Tamil and Chinese, another 6 will use English, Malay and Tamil, 4 will use English and Malay and 2 will use English, Malay and Chinese dialects, while 1 will use English, Malay and Cantonese, 1 will use English and Cantonese and 1 will use English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tamil and Hindi. Once again, English is the language selected by the majority of the respondents as the language they will use with their children, be it stand-alone English or English and some other language/s.

7. Discussion

The findings reveal that language choice in mixed marriages is influenced by factors such as age, domains of communication, attitudes towards the language, and identity. Moreover, language choice is a product of cultural, social and economic pressure encountered by some speakers. It is apparent that for offspring of a mixed marriage, the choice depends also on other variables such as pragmatic value.

In the case of the Sino-Indian speakers, age is an important factor in their language choice particularly in the home domain. The language choice of the Sino-Indians has changed drastically from the older members to the younger members. The speakers whose age group ranges from 50–60 years old are bilingual speakers in Malay and English and those who are 40–49 years old are trilingual, where they speak more in English and to some extent in Tamil and Chinese. However, those who are 30–39 years old have a different linguistic choice. The majority of them use English and partly Tamil, Chinese, and Malay depending on their interlocutors. The Sino-Indians whose age ranges from 13–19 are most likely to use a wide range of languages. However, the majority prefer English. English appears important whatever the age of the respondent.

Language choice of the older Sino-Indians is not the same as that of the younger Sino-Indians. It can be generalized that most Sino-Indians try to accommodate to the language that brings more use to them. Older Sino-Indians preferred English and Malay for political, social and economic access. However, the younger Sino-Indians gravitate towards English and Chinese which provide more social, political and economic gains. This is to be expected because these two languages provide more economic opportunities, specifically in the private sector.

Changes in the language choice of the Sino-Indians is noted in their preference of language in both the work and school domains. It is clear that English is also of great importance when compared to Malay. Notwithstanding the fact that Malay is the national language in the work domain particularly in the private sector, the linguistic code that is preferred by most Sino-Indian speakers in the work domains is English with some Malay. In domains like entertainment and newspapers, English is the preferred language.

When the Sino-Indians were asked about their ethnic identity, mixed answers, which did not relate to their language use, emerged. When asked of their perception of themselves most of them identified themselves as Sino-Indians and a smaller number classified themselves as either Indians or Chinese.

It is clear that the Sino-Indians are pragmatic and are gravitating towards dominant English but are also moving towards a mixed code of English, Tamil, Chinese and Malay.

This study shows that the Sino-Indian respondents in Kuala Lumpur practise nationalism as opposed to nationism (see Omar, 1992) and both English and Malay are languages which they acquire for pragmatic rather than identity reasons.

8. Conclusion

The family as a unit is threatened today by societal, cultural and economic impacts that appear in some societies to disrupt it or dissolve it. Language has at times been seen as a core value in dissemination of heritage to the younger generations. However, in the case of mixed marriages, the amalgamated offspring theoretically create their own identity.

It appears that English has taken priority as a first language amongst Sino-Indians in Kuala Lumpur. English is the more pragmatic code as it grants the Sino-Indians social mobility, education and networking. This paper argues that the demographic location of the Sino-Indian within the country of Malaysia influences language choices. Residing in metropolitan Kuala Lumpur obviously influences the language choice of the children of mixed parentage.

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Maya Khemlani DAVID

Izbor jezika urbanih Sinoindijaca u Kuala Lumpuru u Maleziji

SAŽETAK

U miješanim brakovima izbor jezika igra presudnu ulogu u njegovu očuvanju te pomaže da novi naraštaji održe barem jedan ili oba jezika roditelja. U radu se istražuje izbor jezika nekih Malezijaca kinesko-indijskog podrijetla u Kuala Lumpuru u Maleziji kako bi se otkrilo koji se jezik izabire u nizu područja i među različitim govornicima. Sinoindijci su djeca iz brakova između Indijaca i Kineza. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 30 ispitanika – 14 muškaraca i 16 žena. Na upitnik koji je sadržavao 89 pitanja odgovarali su ispitanici koji su radili ili studirali u Kuala Lumpuru. Rezultati pokazuju da u nekim sinoindijskim obiteljima na izbor jezika utječu čimbenici kao što su dob, područja komunikacije, stavovi prema jeziku i identitet. Dob igra važnu ulogu u izboru jezika, posebice u domaćem okruženju. Neki su stariji sinoindijski govornici dvojezični te govore engleski i malajski, sredovječni su govornici trojezični i govore većinom engleski, a manje tamilski i malajski, dok su mlađi govornici višejezični, ali radije upotrebljavaju engleski. U radu se ispituje i kako ispitanici gledaju na svoje dvojno naslijeđe.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: izbor jezika, miješani brakovi, Sinoindijci, identitet, Malezija

Maya Khemlani DAVID

Le choix de langue des Sino-Indiens à Kuala Lumpur en Malaisie

RÉSUMÉ

Le choix de langue dans les mariages mixtes joue un rôle principal dans la maintenance des langues. Il aide à maintenir au moins une ou deux langues de génération en génération. Dans cette étude on examine le choix de langue de quelques Malaisiens d'origine sino-indienne à Kuala Lumpur en Malaisie pour savoir quel est le choix de langue dans des domaines différents et avec des interlocuteurs différents. Les Sino-Indiens sont des enfants de mariages entre Indiens et Chinois. 30 sujets ont participé à l'étude (14 hommes et 16 femmes). Un questionnaire de 89 questions a été administré aux sujets travaillant ou étudiant à Kuala Lumpur à l'époque. Les résultats démontrent que le choix de langue dans certaines familles sino-indiennes est influencé par des facteurs comme l'âge, les domaines de communication, les attitudes envers la langue et l'identité. L'âge joue un rôle important dans le choix de langue, particulièrement dans le domaine domestique. Certains locuteurs sino-indiens âgés sont bilingues anglais malaisien, les locuteurs d'âge moyen sont trilingues et parlent plutôt anglais et un peu tamoul et chinois, tandis que les locuteurs plus jeunes sont multilingues mais préfèrent utiliser l'anglais. L'étude a également examiné l'attitude des sujets sino-indiens à l'égard de leur double héritage.

MOTS CLÉS: choix de langue, mariages mixtes, Sino-Indiens, identité, Malaisie